

1 Corinthians 4:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

Analysis

Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. Dysphēmoumenoi parakaloumen (δυσφημούμενοι παρακαλοῦμεν, "being slandered, we exhort/encourage")—Paul responds to malicious speech with gracious appeal. The final two metaphors are shocking: perikatharmata (περικαθάρματα, "filth/scum/refuse") and peripsēma (περίψημα, "offscouring/scrapings")—terms for garbage swept away or scapegoats bearing community sins.

These words may allude to a pagan custom where criminals or outcasts were expelled or killed during disasters to purify the city—human pharmakoi (scapegoats). Paul embraces this imagery: apostles are treated as expendable pollution, society's trash. Yet this very degradation fulfills Christ's example, who "became sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21) and died outside the camp, bearing our shame (Heb 13:12-13). The phrase heōs arti (ἕως ἄρτι, "until now") reiterates ongoing reality—not past tribulation but present experience.

Historical Context

Greek cities occasionally practiced pharmakos rituals, expelling or killing marginalized individuals (criminals, slaves, deformed persons) to avert divine wrath. Whether Paul directly references this or simply uses metaphorical language, his point is clear: apostles occupy the lowest social stratum, bearing

vicarious shame for the gospel. This stark imagery climaxes the suffering catalog (vv. 9-13) before Paul pivots to paternal affection (v. 14).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. Are you willing to be considered 'scum and refuse' by the world—or even by other Christians—for the sake of gospel faithfulness?
2. How does this verse challenge prosperity gospel promises and Christian pursuit of cultural influence and respectability?
3. What 'slander' or 'defamation' might you face if you more boldly proclaimed unpopular biblical truths, and how can you prepare to respond with gracious entreaty rather than defensive anger?

Interlinear Text

βλασφημούμενοι	παρακαλοῦμεν·	ὥς	περικαθάρματα	τοῦ
Being defamed	we intreat	as	the filth	G3588
G987	G3870	G5613	G4027	
κόσμου	ἐγενήθημεν	πάντων	περίψημα	ἕως ἄρτι
of the world	we are made	of all things	and are the offscouring	unto this day
G2889	G1096	G3956	G4067	G2193 G737

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 3:45 (Creation): Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people.